



T O P S l o v a k i a

Little Big Country





Slovakia is a country of majestic peaks and fertile valleys, large rivers and small torrents. It emanates both a glorious history and the pulse of modern life. The peace of its natural beauty is supplemented by therapeutic springs; the food and wine add a finishing touch to past and present civilisation; the gentleness of the countryside is balanced by the bustle of the cities – it is a little big country.

The capital Bratislava

Bratislava, a city of half a million inhabitants, often called the Beauty on the Danube, lies in an area bordered in the north by the confluence of the Morava River with the mighty Danube, and in the south by the fertile valleys of the Rye Island (Zitný ostrov). Bratislava is uniquely positioned in the immediate vicinity of the border with two neighbouring countries – Hungary and Austria.



Bratislava Castle







Slovak National Theatre



Bratislava by night

Bratislava emerged at the crossroads of the Amber Route, joining the Baltic North and the Mediterranean, with the road running from the east to the west of Europe along the Danube. At different times, the wheel of history brought Celts, Romans and Slavs to this area; Bratislava was the coronation city of Hungary and in 1526-1784 the capital of the Hungarian Empire. Many beautiful historical monuments of the past ages have been preserved, including the dominant landmark of the city - Bratislava Castle and, beneath it, St. Martin's Dome where nineteen Hungarian rulers had been crowned with the St. Stephen's crown. The most illustrious was Maria Theresa.

The historical centre of the city is adorned by the 15th century Old Town Hall, the Primate's and Grasalkovic Palaces, of which the latter is currently the residence of the president of the republic. Of the four city gates that were part of the 14th century fortifications the only one to have survived is Michael's Gate (Michalska brana). Strolls through the city offer chance to admire the building of the Academia Istrpolitana - the seat of the first university in Bratislava, the National Theatre and many reconstructed palaces.



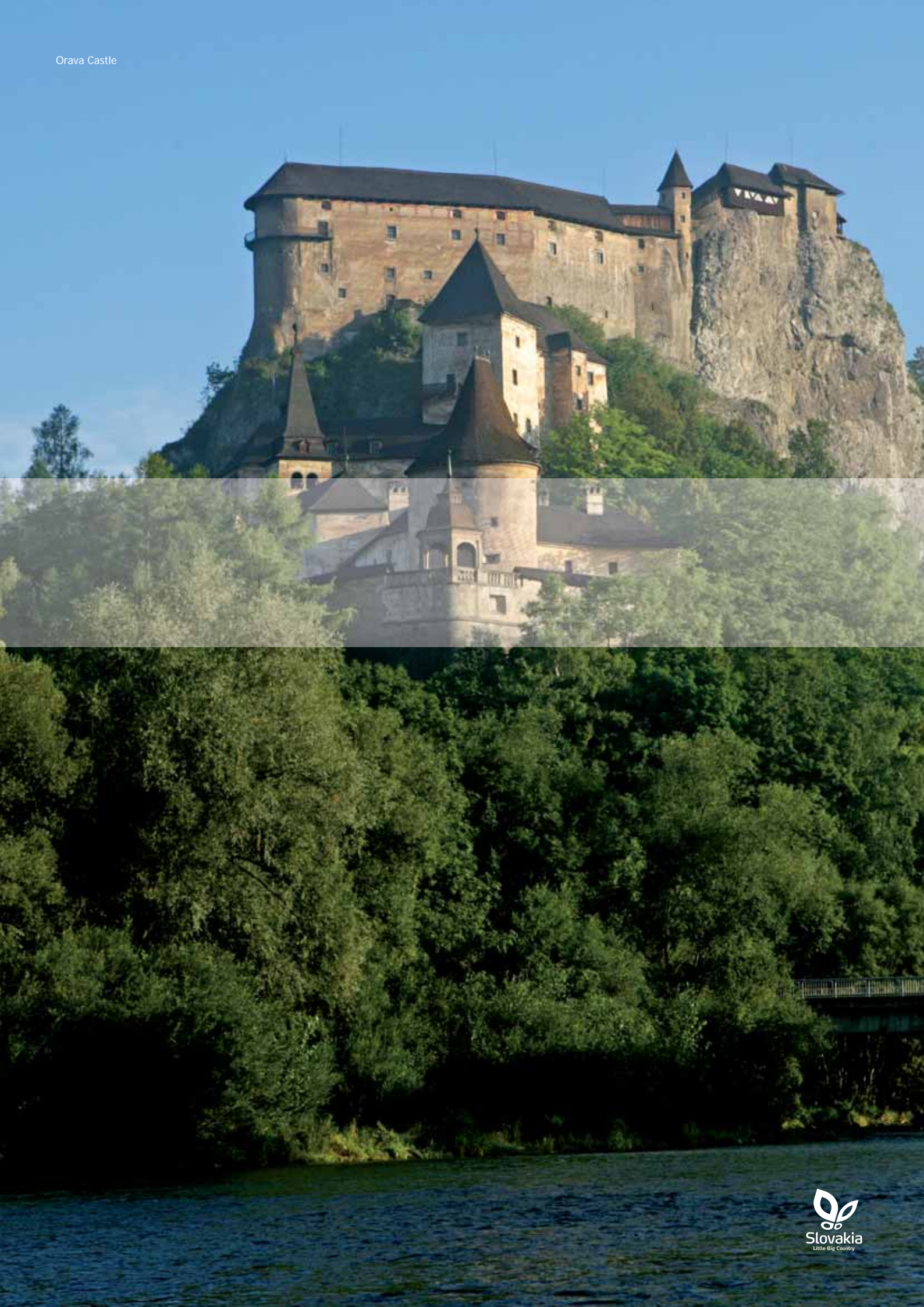
Castles and chateaux



Beckov Castle

Magnificent castles with impressive fortifications that remember the times of mediaeval feasts, jousting tournaments and numerous wars. Sightseeing tours of castle chambers and walks in the gardens are part of a remarkable experience.

The Orava Chateau is one of Slovakia's most beautiful castles. The castle is a pronounced dominant of the Orava region; the highest part of the castle rises 112m above the level of the Orava River. It was founded in the mid-13th century and served as one of the strategic points on the Hungarian-Polish border. The castle has never been conquered.





Nitra Castle



Devín Castle

The romantic Bojnice Chateau with its partly preserved Gothic and Renaissance features lies on the western outskirts of the small town of Bojnice, where it can be viewed from a large part of the Upper Nitra region.

First mentions of the Chateau date back to the beginning of the 12th century. Its silhouette is emphasised by the steep roofs of the palaces, chapel and spires and turrets. The romantic image of the mediaeval castle is complemented by details like the pattern of the various openings, portals, walls, attic gables and metal fittings.







The Tatras – the smallest high mountain range



The High Tatras cover an area of 341 km², of which 260 km² lie on Slovak territory. The highest mountain is Gerlachovsky Peak (2,655m). Twenty-five peaks in the High Tatras are higher than 2,500m.

The Tatras present an opportunity for high-mountain hiking and climbing, and also for pleasant walks and bicycle tours.

The destination of tours and walks are both the chalets located close to the summits of the Tatra peaks, and the glacial lakes with their crystal clear water. The best known are Strbske, Popradske, Skalnate and Hincovo lakes, the last of which is the largest lake in the Tatras.



Ski alpinism in the High Tatras

Kriván

The High Tatras are the highest and most massive range in the Carpathian Bend. The shapes of the peaks that had been modelled by glaciers are monumental and with an exciting morphology, the same as the deep valleys and folds that hold the “eyes of the sea” – glacial lakes.

A popular destination is Hrebienok, which can be reached by funicular from Stary Smokovec.

A trip by an aerial ropeway without a single supporting column from Lomnicke sedlo (fold) to Lomnicky stit (peak) (2,632 m) is an exhilarating experience.



The Low Tatras ridge



Tery's chalet – the High Tatras



Ski alpinism in the High Tatras



Skalnate Lake beneath Lomnicky Peak

The ropeway to Lomnický štít.





Natural sights



The beauty of the landscape is complemented by jewels hidden under the ground; caves and their wonderful nooks are such jewels. There are forty-four caves in Slovakia; twelve are open to visitors.

Walks with majestic slopes on all sides, the sound of music in an open-air auditorium, boat rides on underground rivers – all these are experiences that add to the beauty of the natural landscape.



The High Tatras



Slovak Paradise



Saffron



Ochtina Aragonite Cave

One of the most famous European ice caves is Dobsina in Slovak Paradise. It is interestingly located at a low level above the sea and has gorgeous ice tunnels, columns and waterfalls sleeping in the ice.

The Slovak Ore Mountains (Slovenske Rudohorie) conceal the Ochtina Aragonite Cave with walls covered in fascinating shapes and forms reminiscent of iron flowers and shrubs; the aragonite continues to grow, giving the flowers a breath of freshness and delicate fragility.

Low Tatras ridge





Domica Cave

The Low Tatras – Vrbicke Lake

Bystrianska Cave

The Demanovska Cave in the Low Tatras was created by the Demanovka stream cutting through limestone rock and is now a large system of cave tunnels. The luxurious colours and forms are reflected in names like Emerald Lake, Pink Chamber, Black Gallery or Gold Gallery and Lake.

The beautifully preserved monument which is a part of the Gothic Route invites visitors to eastern Slovakia to embark on a trip to the Gothic Age. Like pearls in St. Stephen's Crown, jewels such as Spis Castle, the Gothic cathedral in Spisske Podhradie, the world-famous altar of Master Jan Pavol in Levoca and many other incredibly beautiful and preserved churches lie in a row, close to one another.

The Gothic Route







Betliar



Zehra - church of the Holy Spirit



Kosice – St Elizabeth Cathedral



Levoca – town hall

The Gothic Route is 267 km long. An integrated circuit, it presents the most interesting and valuable treasures of the Spis and Gemer regions – castle monuments rising high on top of the hills, generally well-preserved historical town centres, museums and cathedrals, as well as smaller gems like rural churches, burghers' and craftsmen's houses and picturesque stone bridges. The Gothic Route is about the fascinating traces left here by the past cultural and historical epochs. The Gothic heritage of the region is complemented by the towns sought out by tourists – the castle at Krasna Horka or the Manner House in Betliar with a magnificent park spread out on 70 hectares of land, boasting exotic plants from different parts of the world.

St James church in Levoca – wooden altar by Master Pavol of Levoca



Gold and silver in the Middle Ages





St Anthony church

Banska Stiavnica

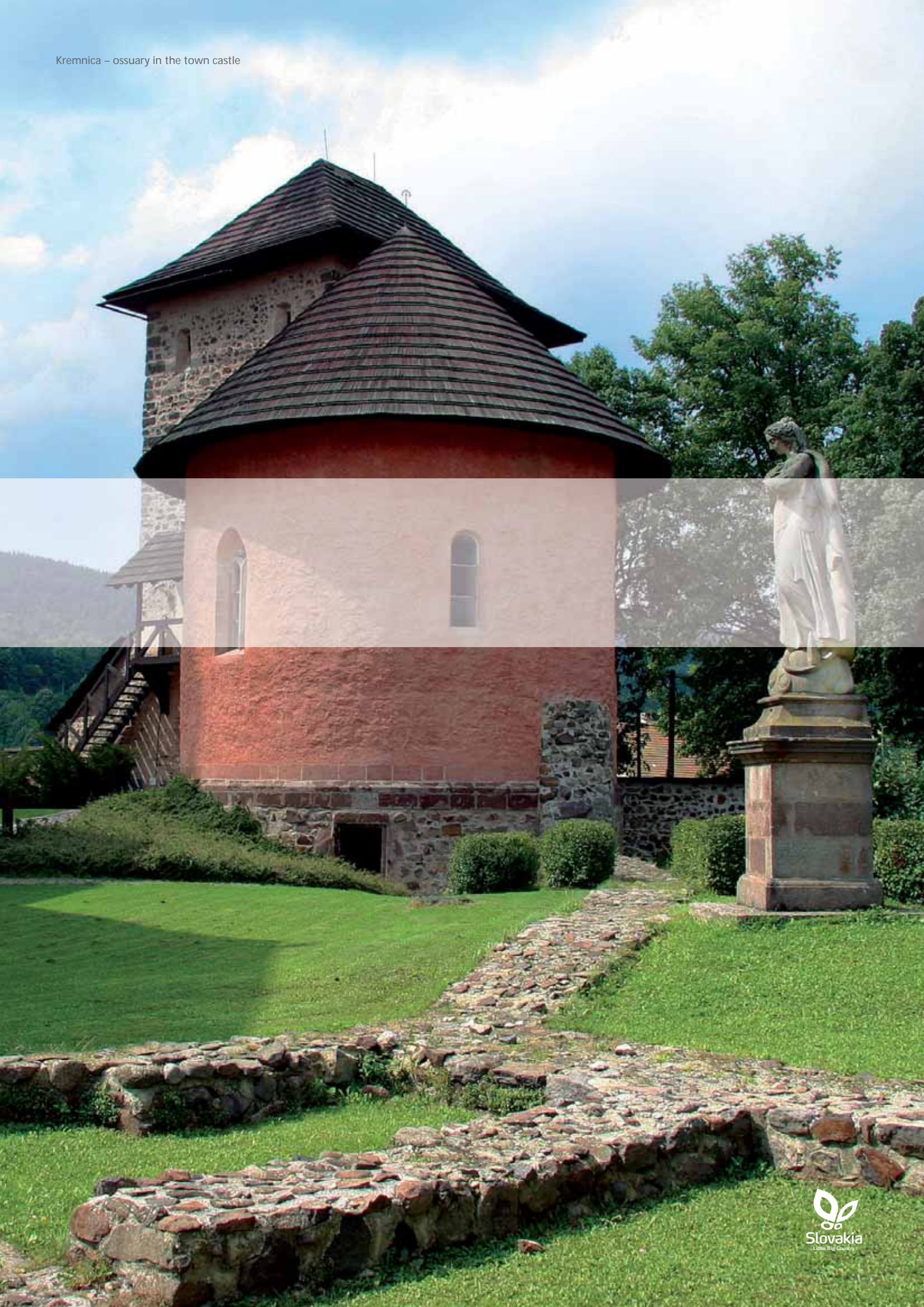
Since ancient times gold and silver had been considered a symbol of wealth and power. The throne of the Hungarian rulers was sustained by the royal mining towns where these minerals were mined. Walks through Kremnica and Banska Stiavnice evoke the era of their greatest fame and power.

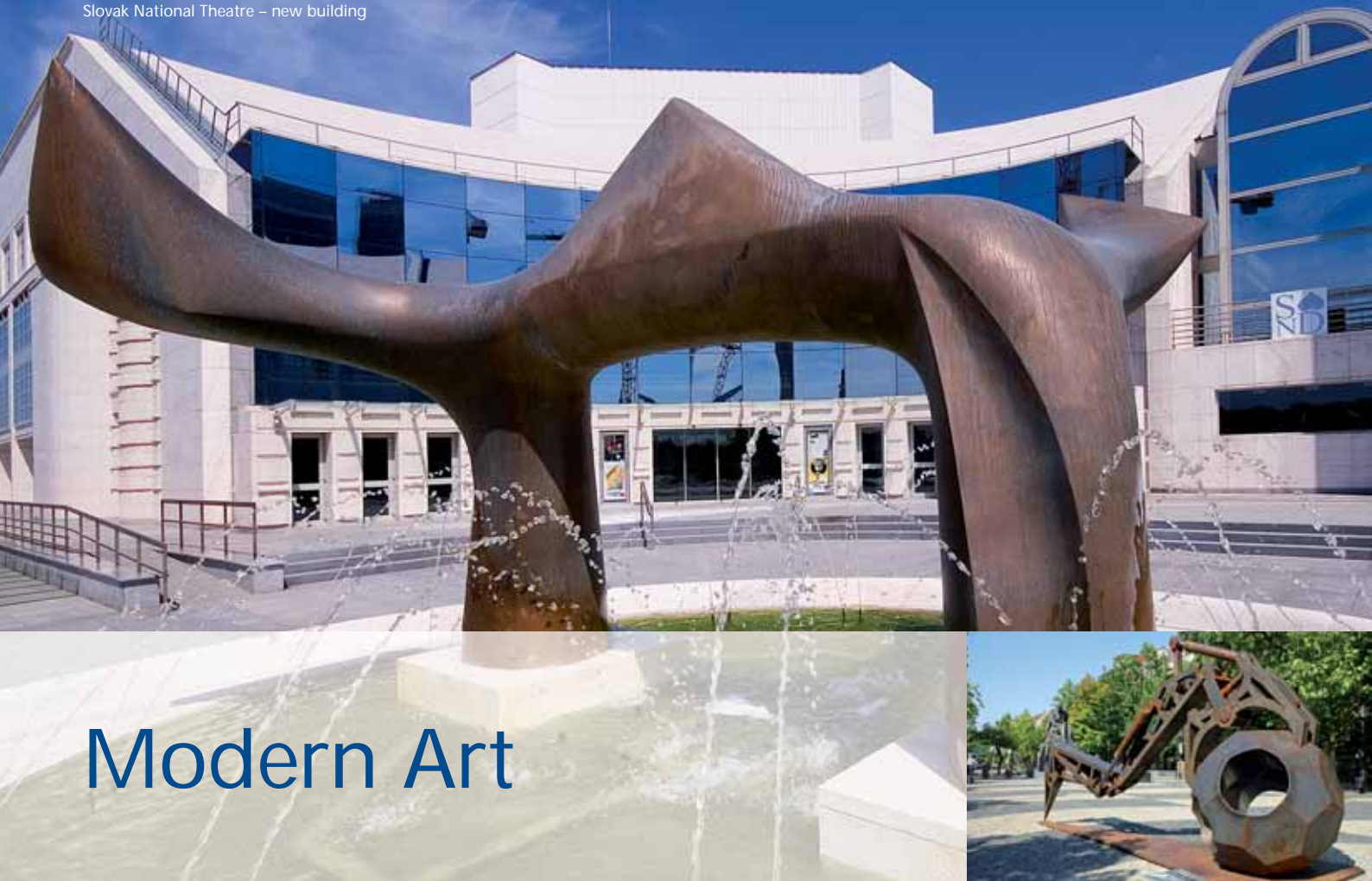


Centre of Europe

Kremnica, once a free royal town, is called the Gold Centre of Europe due to the large deposits of gold and silver which at the time of the greatest boom in the 14th century were an important pillar of the Hungarian Empire. The era of the town's greatest development and glory can be evoked on public tours of the mining galleries where the valuable minerals used to be extracted with the help of the technical inventions of the time. Besides the lovely historical town centre with its many monuments, interesting sites include the mint. It has been in operation since the 14th century when gold florins were struck there. Slovak euro coins are minted there now. The mint contains an exposition of historical currencies and unique steam-driven stamp machines.

Banska Stiavnica is another "golden" gem of mediaeval Hungarian mining where with every step the visitor can feel the air of past glory. The exhibition of minerals, the historical expositions at the Old and New Chateaux, tours of mining galleries and a unique outdoor museum with preserved period buildings – all this completes the image of the town and its surroundings as they were at the time of its greatest mining glory. Guides in historical miners' costumes bring closer the history of the hard mining craft. The effect is strengthened by the miners' hard hats offered to visitors at the site. Banska Stiavnica has been included on the UNESCO World Heritage list and is visited by more than 40 thousand tourists a year. In 2008 the town celebrates the 770th anniversary of the bestowal of municipal privileges.





Modern Art

Bratislava - Hviezdoslav Square

Slovakia breathes history and has a dense network of museums and art galleries. Nonetheless, old artefacts are supplemented with modern art by contemporary Slovak artists, both renowned and beginning. Elements of modern art can be admired in the open air or on walks in the capital city.



Wine Route

In vino veritas and that, together with much other interesting gastronomic experience, may be found during the pleasant tour of the Wine Route.



St Urban's Day

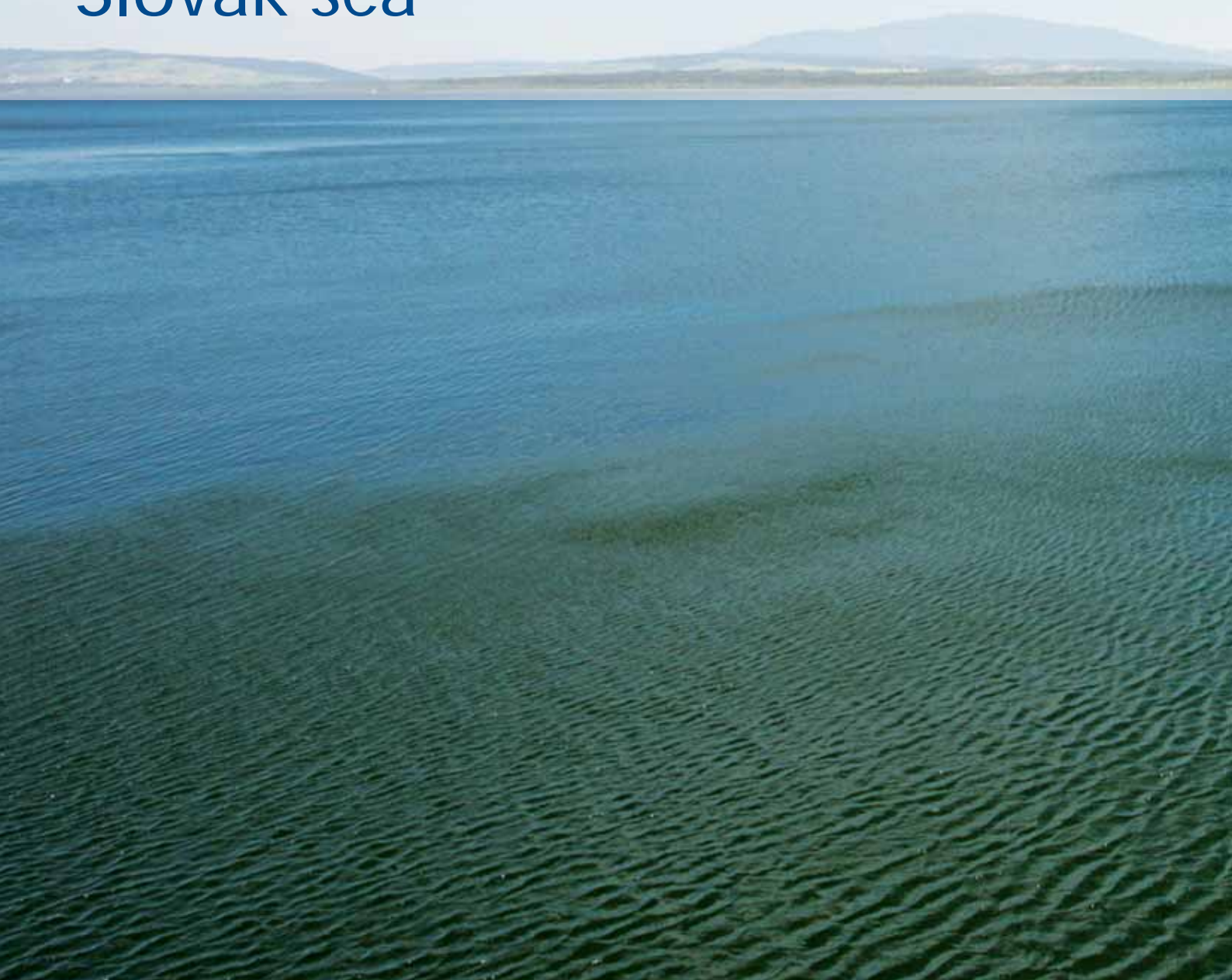


Pezinok Wine Salon

There are six viticulture regions in Slovakia. The most exclusive of them all is the Tokai region along the border with Hungary; but the most popular are the Small Carpathian vineyards, stretching from the hills of the Small Carpathians at Raca, which is a part of Bratislava, across Svaty Jur and Pezinok to Modra, which is famous for its ceramics. In the 18th century, the red Frankovka wine from this region was a favourite of the Empress Maria Theresa. Delicious food is inextricably linked to wine; the most sought after delicacies are traditional goose dishes from Slovensky Grob.

Wine is celebrated traditionally in the autumn during the wine festival when vine-growers celebrate the end of the harvest. The first produce of the season – young wine, but also more ancient gems hidden in individual cellars, may be tasted in November, during the traditional open-cellar days. In May, lovers of good wine may enjoy St Urban's Day, the feast of the patron of wine and vine-growers, joined with presentations of wines and regional traditions.

Slovak sea





Water mill at Kolarovo



Water reservoir at Liptovska Mara



Liptovska Mara

Slovakia lies in the heart of Europe and that is why direct access to the sea is compensated by a large number of dams and reservoirs.

Liptovska Mara was formed by the submersion of a whole valley and is now the reservoir with the largest volume of water. As such, it is referred to as the Slovak sea.



The Danube – Gabčíkovo

Due to its crystal clear water, the Orava Dam is a popular tourist destination in northern Slovakia. Eastern Slovakia boasts the Zemplin Dam, which is of a natural origin. It is the destination of especially those who love fishing, swimming and the increasingly popular water sports. In the southern part of Slovakia, not far from the capital, there is the Gabčíkovo complex. Besides hydroelectric plants and ship locks it also offers facilities for swimmers, sight-seeing boat rides, wild-water canoeing and boating on the calm side channels as well as active water sports – water scooters, water-skiing and windsurfing.



Fishing



Zemplínska Širava



Liptovská Mara



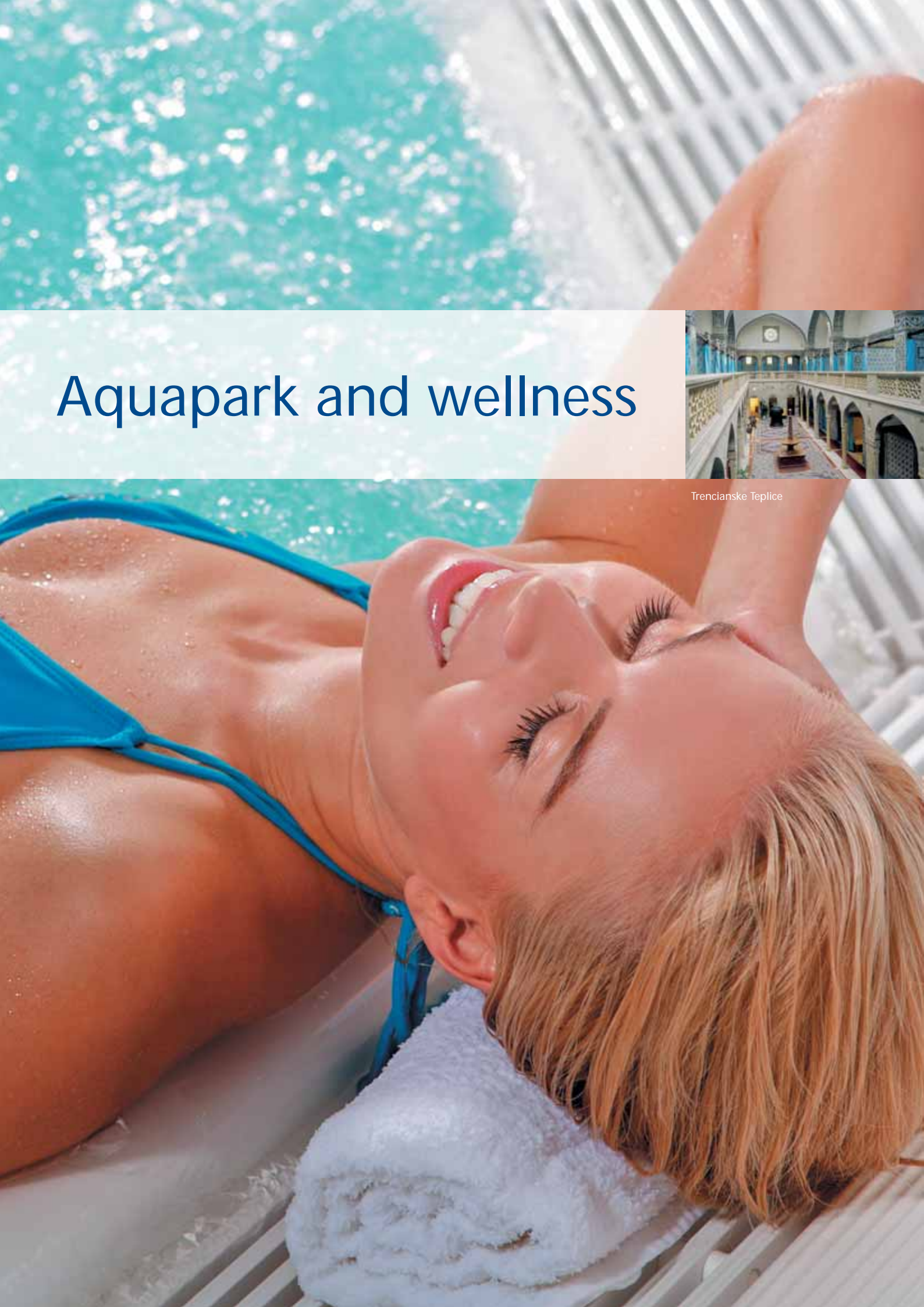
Gabcikovo



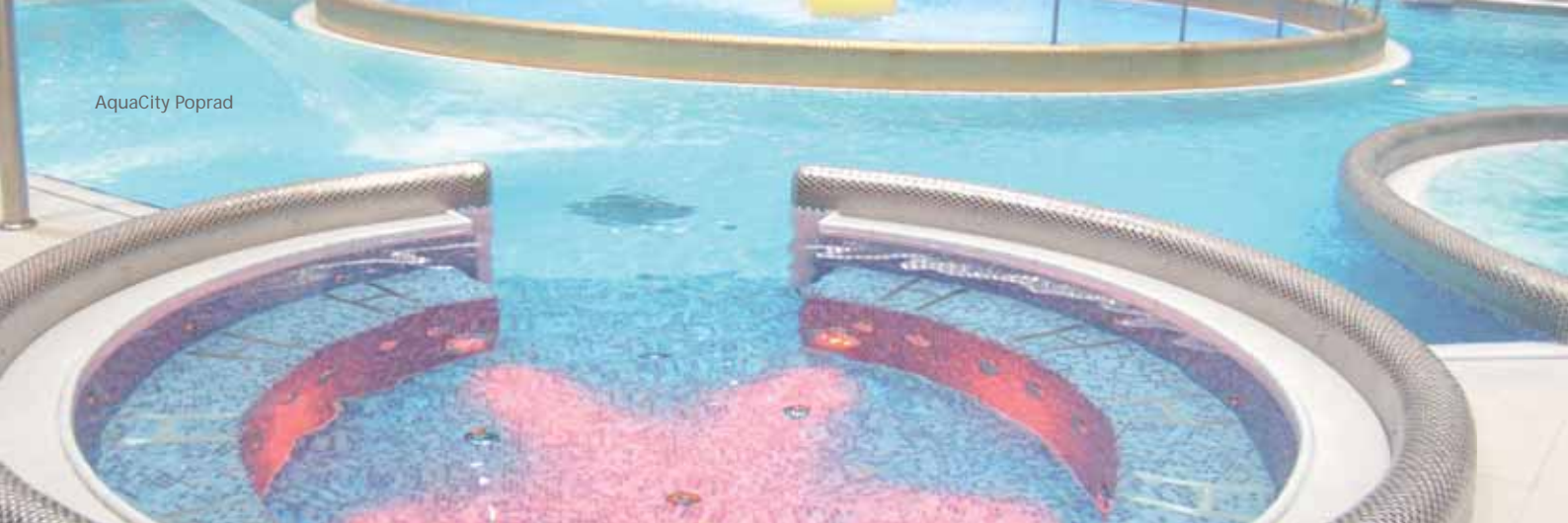
Aquapark and wellness



Trencianske Teplice



AquaCity Poprad



Oravice Meander Skipark



AquaCity Poprad

Slovakia has rich sources of mineral springs, many with therapeutic properties. The geological structure of the area is also the source of thermal springs used in spa treatment as well as swimming for leisure.

Year-round operating thermal baths are located close to the Tatras, thus offering relaxation to visitors after mountain tours or winter skiing. Traditional swimming pools are equipped with modern amenities and offer wellness programmes – saunas, various types of massage, aromatherapy and hot compresses. The offer of spa towns like Piestany, Dudince, Trencianske Teplice, Rajcke Teplice, Sliac and Bardejov includes new aqua parks. The spas have been modernised and are a very popular destination, not only for their therapeutic waters.

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